

**The Battle over Israel's Fragile Democracy:
Socio-legal Observations and Personal Experience**

A lecture by Avi Rubin,

2023 Greenberg Middle East Scholar-in-Residence



Wednesday, October 4

7:30 PM, Gannett Auditorium, Palamountain Hall, Skidmore College

Admission is free and open to the public

About the lecture:

In January 2023, the Israeli government proposed reforms to the country's judicial system. These reforms aim to significantly limit the power of the Supreme Court, which has been the single structural check on the power of the government for decades. The so-called judicial reform was met with mass protests led by academics, lawyers, prominent figures in the hi-tech industry and the business sector, and civil society groups. They have argued that the judicial overhaul would undermine the rule of law in Israel and immediately jeopardize its democracy. The protests gained support from senior military officers and former heads of the secret services, as well as thousands of reserve soldiers who declared their intention to discontinue their service. In late July, the government passed a law stripping the Supreme Court of its power to obstruct government decisions on the grounds of the doctrine of reasonableness. This decision dragged the country into a constitutional crisis.

In his public talk, Professor Avi Rubin will offer some observations on the judicial overhaul and its context from a socio-legal perspective. In addition, he will share his personal experience as a university professor teaching "sensitive" topics in a volatile political period and as an active participant in the greatest street protests Israel has ever known.

About the speaker:

Avi Rubin received his Ph.D. in History and Middle East Studies from Harvard (2006) and has been teaching at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Department of Middle East Studies since 2006. Rubin has specialized in the socio-legal history of the late Ottoman Empire. He published extensively on various aspects of legal change in the age of modernity. His publications explore themes such as legal codification, legal culture, cultural perceptions of the rule of law, political trials, and legal positivism. His first and oft-cited monograph, titled *Ottoman Nizamiye Courts: Law and Modernity* (2011), is a revisionist exploration of Ottoman legal change in the nineteenth century. Adopting a "law in action" approach, it is a pioneering study of one of the most important landmarks in the passage of the Ottoman empire to modernity, the nizamiye (reformed) court system. His second book, titled *Ottoman Rule of Law and the Modern Political Trial: The Yildiz Case* (2018), delves into the emergence of a new culture of legalism in the late Ottoman period. In recent years, Rubin has been studying myths of legal continuity, focusing on "legal narratives" in Israel.